

### III

## PROGRESS OR REGRESS: THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A

AT the close of the preceding lecture I described the present crisis in world history as a culture fighting for its life. The decay of the ideals of democracy which I attempted to picture is not only the result of attacks from without but of boring from within. The rights of man, the ideals of freedom, right, and justice are all bound up with a certain religious and metaphysical structure—an ideology if you will—which much of the science and philosophy of our time has slowly but surely undermined. What, we may well ask, will be the fortunes of this fight?

Now I am myself not wholly blind to the possibility that this degradation of democratic dogma, together with the degradation of science with which it is so closely connected, are symptoms of a permanent regress in our social and cultural life. I am not insensible to the argument of Nietzsche that, evolutionary naturalism having destroyed the structure with which these values have been bound up, the values are gone also. I confess to an uneasy feeling that the "Decline of the West," of which Spengler writes, may be more real than we care to think, and there sweeps over me at times a wave of historical pessimism which it is difficult to breast. In my heart of hearts I do not really believe it, but it represents a possibility at least, which the more thoughtful man must face. Thus the topic of this present lecture: *Progress or Regress*.

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In each of the preceding lectures I prefaced my discussion with some remarks on the rôle of the philosopher. The philosopher is, indeed, one who thinks a little more stubbornly than other people. He is thus, also, one who remains of value for all times, for he rediscovers, and affirms ever anew, the things that must be taken for granted. But there is something more to the philosopher than this. I should like to express this third function in the words of the English philosopher Bosanquet.

The philosopher, as he defines him, is simply "one who does in the form of reflection what every thinking creature is doing in one way or another from birth to death." Every *living* creature seeks, of course, to survive—to persist in his own being; every sentient creature seeks the happiness which is the sign of his well-being; but in so far as man is a thinking being he seeks something more—namely, to understand—to make his own life, and the world in which that life is lived, intelligible to himself.

This is what philosophers have always been doing. They have believed in a Divine Providence—a rational principle in history—one which overrules the passions and unreason of sinful men. They have believed in Progress—in some far-off divine event towards which the whole creation moves—an outcome which gives meaning and value to the historical process. This faith has been bound up with the other democratic dogmas—belief in the primacy of reason and in the inalienable rights of man—bound up so closely, indeed, that if they do not hang together, they will hang separately. Thus it is that philosophy has always included a philosophy of history, and the problem of progress or regress, or of an eternal recurrence in human history, has always been central in the philosopher's reflections. It is, then, to this third problem of democratic ideology that we must turn our attention in the present lecture.

II. THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CULTURE.  
HISTORICAL PESSIMISM.

A

An outstanding feature of present-day thought is historical pessimism. In contrast to the overweening optimism of the nineteenth century, with its dogma of necessary progress, there has been a widespread revulsion of feeling which has led to exaggerated movements in the opposite direction. There are those who think of the historical movement in which we now find ourselves as a definite regress—not progress.

In this mood, and on the basis of these ideas, there are many also who have revived the ancient notion of cycles of history. I think you would be surprised to find how many of the leading minds of the present day have abandoned completely the nineteenth century faith in progress and are coming to feel that if you look beneath the surface you will find the same old eternal recurrence. Of history Schopenhauer wrote that it is merely "a succession of lies, robberies and murders. If you know one page you know it all." And even the man of the street, face to face with the world as it is today, would say in his delightful slang, "Schopenhauer, you said a mouthful." I said you would be surprised how many of the more thoughtful men of the day feel this way. You might also be surprised to find that feeling deep down in your own heart.

The outstanding representative of this historical pessimism has been Oswald Spengler in his famous book *The Decline of the West*. The Preface to the first edition is dated Munich, December 1917; it was written before the first World War, but it so completely expressed the mood of Europe following upon the conclusion of that war that it may be considered a symbol of the post-war period. It is a

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philosophy of history the main thesis of which, so far as concerns our present interest, is the following. All cultures pass through three stages, the religious, the cultural, and that of civilization and science. The first stage is the creative period. It is then that the powers of a people are fresh and their imagination vivid. Under the driving force of a great faith they erect their temples and they build their states. A great culture is created and in this period of culture—of literature and art, of science and philosophy—a people lives and moves for many centuries. Finally this period passes over into that of science and civilization. The essential character of this period is neither faith nor culture, but rather utility and comfort. Ends sink into the background and men become engrossed in the means of life. Science becomes chiefly invention, and for the goal of ultimate understanding men substitute that of manipulation and control. In such a period a man who is not a scientist or an engineer is, as Spengler says, simply a fool.

### B

This philosophy of history is, of course, in a sense, nothing but the doctrine of the three stages of Comte, the religious, the philosophical, and the scientific. Yes, but with a great difference; and it is just this difference which is of special significance for us. Comte's doctrine was developed in the optimistic century of positivistic science and progress; Spengler's doctrine is the product of twentieth century pessimism. For Comte, and his fellows, science is the final stage of human perfection; we have now only to go on from glory to glory. For Spengler, the period of science and civilization, of physical comforts and of mere adaptation, is, so to speak, the beginning of the end, no matter how long the process of decline may be.

This historical pessimism found little response at first in

the American mind. The historians simply laughed it off, and such criticism as was attempted barely scratched the surface, being confined to minor details rather than concerned with principles. But Spengler has, so to speak, had his revenge. With the tremendous growth of interest in the philosophy of history of the last decade, and especially with the outbreak of a global war, there has been a great revival of interest. He has become the subject of many papers and dissertations in our university seminars. His theory has again been riddled with criticisms, but one still has the uneasy feeling that the essential idea is indeed irrefutable, and that our civilization is going, for the time being at least, in the direction which he describes. In any case, it is this historical pessimism which our democratic way of life and the political philosophy it embodies must meet. Harold Laski has said, truly, I believe, that "every political theory is a philosophy of history." The political theory of the nineteenth century, the older liberalism of which men speak, was bound up with the dogma of necessary progress and the philosophy of history which it expresses. Much of the political philosophy of the twentieth century is characterized by the denial of this dogma.

### III. THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS.

#### A

It is quite commonly held that the belief in progress is wholly modern. Thus J. B. Bury, the historian, in his book, *The Idea of Progress*, traces it to three sources, all recent—namely, the perfectionism of the period of the French Revolution, the evolutionism of Darwin, and the Hegelian idealism. But this is, to say the least, an exaggeration, for, as Croce, the great philosopher of history, has shown, the belief in progress has its roots deep in the entire Christian

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tradition. It is, indeed, only as such that its power over the Western mind can be understood.

The moral and political philosophy pictured in the preceding lecture was itself bound up with a philosophy of history, namely, the conception of Providence. God created man and in creation endowed him not only with certain animal good, but also with certain inalienable rights which belong to him as man, as a rational being. Society and state are created as means for the enhancement and conservation of these rights. The civil order is based upon the natural or moral world-order. Wherever these basal human values are conserved and enhanced we have social and political progress, wherever they are weakened or lost we have social and political degeneration or regress.

With the gradual breaking up of this philosophical structure went the providential philosophy of history, and for it was substituted a doctrine of automatic or merely necessary natural evolution and progress. Instead of saying, "God's in his Heaven, all's right with the world," men said "everything evolves, therefore all will be well." Belief in automatic progress became, as Guyau, the French philosopher, pointed out, the modern man's substitute for belief in Providence.

This modern idea of progress, naturally enough, became bound up ever more closely with the Darwinian theory of evolution and this idea became dominant in popular thought. Darwin himself sounded this note when, in concluding *The Origin of Species*, he wrote: "As Natural Selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend towards perfection." Just as for the economic optimism of the nineteenth century, the principle of *laissez faire* was believed to lead necessarily to economic justice or just distribution, so for this same optimism, evolution was supposed necessarily to imply progress.

All of which led Herbert Spencer to his famous dictum that "the law of progress is the most certain of all facts."

Now the significant thing for us is that no sooner had the belief in progress become tied up with naturalistic evolution than the belief itself began to dissolve. There is every reason that this should be so. The attempt to deduce or to derive human moral progress from naturalistic evolution, the law of progress from the law of evolution, is an especially egregious form of the naturalistic fallacy.

Natural selection is a wholly mechanical process. It does not work towards the good—it has no ends, either good or bad—it works only towards adaptation and survival. "So careful of the type she seems, so careful of the single life," wrote Tennyson. Actually, as we now see, "nature" is equally careless of the type. She cares no more for species than for individuals. For evolution, so far as science pictures it, one species is as good as another—the louse as good as the mastodon and both as good as man.

You have most of you doubtless seen that marvellous scientific fantasy of Walt Disney's "Fantasia," put to Stravinski's music—that picture of creative evolution, which, as the announcer said, is the story of evolution as the scientific imagination sees it. What did this story have to say to you? Could there be a more perfect picture of complete meaninglessness and irrationality? The futile monsters created only to be wiped out again. The meaningless pain upon pain, as the heat becomes intolerable and as, one by one, the palpitating masses of flesh and blood succumb to destruction and decay. Even Darwin, who was in the main optimistic, was at times overcome by the picture his scientific imagination presented to him, and drew back aghast before its monstrous waste and irrationality.

Leo Tolstoy was one of the first to point the finger of scorn at the Victorian illusion that evolution is necessarily

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progress. And he was wholly right. In his book, *My Confession*, he tells us how for a long time he was imposed upon by the illusion of progress and how he finally detected the fallacy that underlies it. The "law of evolution" is, indeed, as Herbert Spencer said, development from the simple to the complex—from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous—but it does not at all follow that the complex is the better. Tolstoy did not use the term but he pointed out the naturalistic fallacy which underlies the entire argument. The loss of this illusion of progress is, I believe, one of the best things that could have happened to us, and men like Tolstoy, who have been instrumental in our disillusionment, have been our greatest benefactors. The absurd notions of progress which dominated the nineteenth century, which, as the historian Ferrero points out, "easily included both peace and war, justice and violence, steam plows and Lewis guns, Pasteur serum and melinite—" it is indeed well that these are gone. It is only when we recognize this fallacy for what it is that a justifiable belief in progress becomes possible.

### III. PROGRESS AS FACT AND BELIEF: THE CRITERION OF HUMAN PROGRESS

#### A

The French philosopher Sorel of whom I spoke in the preceding lecture wrote a book called *The Illusions of Progress*. It was, partly at least, the realization of these illusions which led him to react so violently against the democratic ideal of gradual development in political and social institutions and to espouse a revolutionary philosophy of force. In his even more famous book, *Reflections on Violence*, this philosophy is expounded with great vigor. The point I wish to make here is that, having abandoned the belief in reason in nature and in man, he abandoned also the belief in prog-



ress which goes with it and turned to a philosophy of irrationalism and violence.

This disillusionment with the entire idea of progress is widespread and is closely bound up, I believe, with false ideas as to what human progress is and as to the ground of belief in human progress. It was only natural that when these ideas failed us we should throw overboard the belief itself. The older liberalism of the nineteenth century identified progress largely with the development of modern science and invention and looked for the liberation and moralizing of man through these forces. Since they found the essence of progress in the mechanisms of life, it was only natural that they came to think of progress itself as a mechanical process. This same liberalism found the ground for belief in progress in evolution; it was only natural that when they found that evolution did not, as they supposed, guarantee progress, they should throw over the entire idea of progress itself.

Let us first, then, examine this idea of human progress itself. What is the criterion of such progress? What is involved in our saying of any period in human history, such as the nineteenth century, Yes, that was progress?

First of all, such a judgment is always passed upon some process—on some more or less continuous change—let us say from the stagecoach to the steam engine, and from the steam engine to the automobile. Or, let us say, from the simple common law of early English custom to the elaborate complexity of modern civil and constitutional law. The judgment of progress always seems, moreover, to involve three things: an elaboration or increase of complexity; some continuing identity of purpose throughout the change; and, finally, some reference, however remote, to ultimate ends and values realized in the process—ends and values which themselves do not progress but which are the measure of progress.

This is what any genuine human progress would neces-

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sarily be. As we say, to be progress at all, it must be moral progress. But in recent decades men have been inclined to find the criterion of progress elsewhere, in ideas more akin to our scientific and positivistic age. Just as the idea of science itself has been, as we have seen, divorced from the ultimate spiritual values with which it was first connected, and identified with the pure instrumentalism of means, so the idea of progress, so closely connected with the ideas of reason and of science, has also been divorced from them and become but a pittance of its former self.

Progress, we are told by a recent writer, "is the discovery and application of the law of cause and effect. Real progress, says Sir William Ramsay, "is learning how better to employ energy and better to effect its transformation." Definitions of this type, of which there are many, are most enlightening, for they show beyond doubt the way our minds have been working, and make it quite clear that Spengler's analysis of our culture is not without its element of truth.

It is as though men said, "We will abandon all ideas of ultimate ends or values and think only in terms of means or instrumentalities. We will assume that we have progress wherever we increase the use of our discoveries of relations of cause and effect, whenever we learn better how to employ energy and better to effect its transformation." But this, as we are coming to see, is sheer nonsense. For, either it means that the accumulation of means is valuable, no matter what they are used for, than which there is clearly nothing more intrinsically senseless; or else it means the wholly ungrounded assumption that mere elaboration of the means of life works necessarily to the good of life—the untruth of which history has completely shown.

The simple truth is that elaboration or complexity, is the only notion of progress that we can form if we start with such premises. Elaboration of the means of locomotion, in-

crease of population, development of more and more ingenious techniques may occur, but none of these is necessarily good in itself or leads necessarily to the good. Indeed the reverse may be the case. The paradoxical law, that wealth may accumulate and men decay, is eminently applicable to the conception of progress. The only tenable criterion possible is one founded upon a conception of objective intrinsic values.

Such a criterion was attempted by the philosophical biologist J. A. Thomson in his book, *What is Man?* Every social change, he tells us, must run the gauntlet of *successively higher criteria*. "Is it sound physically, biologically, psychologically, socially?" The principle is unhappily phrased, but, nevertheless, hits upon an essential character of any adequate criterion of progress. If progress in history cannot be determined by any single criterion whether technical, economic, biological, or even social and political, but only by a series of successively higher criteria, it is evident that in the very notion of progress itself is bound up the notion of an objective scale of values; and that this scale must be a system which transcends the changes it measures.

## B

This, then, is the first step in our argument. The only possible criterion of progress is a moral criterion. Such a criterion, however, can be found only in the essential nature of the Everlasting Man, therefore in the absolute values that make him everlasting. Only in so far as the democratic ideals of inalienable rights and absolute justice are realized is there genuine progress. But now we come to the second step in the argument. Granted such a criterion, what are the actual facts of human history? Is it possible to establish trends in history at all? And can we determine whether the trends are in this direction?

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The difficulties in the way of establishing such trends are not to be minimized. It is precisely these difficulties which, in part at least, have led many historians and students of human culture to abandon the idea. And yet the evidence for human progress in this sense, if not such as to demonstrate it, is nevertheless, I believe, sufficient to make it highly probable. If it is not, as Herbert Spencer would have us believe, the most certain of all facts, it is certainly a reasonable belief.

The difficulties in establishing moral progress as a fact are twofold. In the first place, there is the difficulty of time. The historic time, in which human progress is to be detected, is to the time of cosmic and biological evolution as five minutes to twenty-four hours. Writers such as Havelock Ellis and Wiggam have made much of this fact, pointing out that, seen in the perspective of cosmic evolution, human evolution is too short to enable us to establish trends with any certainty. But there is a second difficulty. Progress as a belief, giving meaning to our social and political life, must include the future also, and for this no empirical evidence from history is possible.

The first difficulty is very real and ought not to be minimized. Nevertheless, it is possible so to formulate the problem as to answer the question whether there has been moral progress or not with reasonable certainty. I do not believe that we can show that men are happier than they were in the beginnings of human time. What we call happiness is too subjective a thing in terms of which to measure human value. I doubt whether we can show that individual men and women are better, although that is, I think, more possible. But one thing we can show, I think, and that is that, more and more, there has been established in our laws and institutions the conditions for the self-realization and dignity of man. Despite many signs to the contrary at various times,

the general movement has been in the direction of "nobler modes of life, with sweeter manners and purer laws." Even in so short a period of historical time as that of our Western world the fact stands out beyond cavil. One has only to read that classic of the subject, the chapter on "Moral Progress" in T. H. Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*, to be convinced of this truth.

## C

The historical evidence, then, when rightly approached and rightly interpreted, does seem to indicate that there *has been* a moral progress in humanity, that man has indeed, as we say, come a long way; and there seems to be good hope that in the future he will tread greater paths still. We have a right to say, with the historian Ferrero, "the progress in which we had perhaps too readily believed is not altogether an illusion."

But evidence for progress in the past, though it may give us hope for the future, does not give us a belief sufficient to afford a basis for man's moral and political life. A law of progress, such as that of which Spencer spoke, must be more than a pious hope; it must be a reasonable belief, and no belief is reasonable that is not based on some kind of evidence. This is the second difficulty in the way of any belief in necessary progress.

There is obviously no empirical or historical evidence for a law of progress which includes the future also. No one can say with any certainty that the progress which we seem to see in the past will not begin to slacken tomorrow, or perhaps has already begun to halt, and we be unaware of it. We may be going back—there may be a degradation not only of democratic dogma but of human life itself. True, but no one can say for a certainty that the sun will rise tomorrow. So far as empirical evidence is concerned there is no evidence that today is not the last day of mortal life on this globe.

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The point is that there is no empirical evidence for any universal law—for any principle that applies to the future as well as the past.

If we believe in what is called the principle of the uniformity of nature—that everything that happens in the future will have a cause, or, as we say, be governed by law, it is not because we have any empirical evidence that this will be so; it is rather because we know that, *if it is not so*, physical science or knowledge is impossible. The situation is in principle the same in the case of the postulate or law of progress. If we believe that progress is necessary, it is only because we know that, if it is not, history in the sense of meaningful process is impossible. As Henry Adams has said, the belief in progress is “the lifeblood of history!”

The sub-title of this lecture is the philosophy of history, and with the foregoing statement I come to the essentially philosophical aspect of my general thesis—and what, to my mind, is the essentially logical foundation for the dogma of progress.

Belief in progress *is* the lifeblood of history—which is the same thing as saying that it is a necessary postulate without which there *is* no history, and no history can be written. More and more historians are coming to see that this is so. Without this postulate we have merely chronology, not history. The reason for this seems to be clear. The essence of history is interpretation—the discovery of the meaning in temporal events. If there is no meaning to tie them together, we have merely brute succession or chronology. Now it is quite clear, I think, that there can be no meaning without value movement, forward or backward. The French Revolution is an historical event, but what makes it such an event is its meaning. We might interpret it as a stage in the development of modern democracy, as most historians do, or we might interpret it as a regress, but either one or the

other it must be, otherwise it is a meaningless collection of unrelated happenings and not history. There could be, of course, history, in a certain sense, based upon the postulate of regress; there might be a story of things continually going to the dogs. But, after all, that seems impossible. As the notion of the good is positive and that of evil a negation of the good, so the notion of regress has meaning only in relation to the more ultimate positive conception of progress. Progress is then, after all, the lifeblood of history; without that postulate history is "sound and fury signifying nothing."

I am well aware, of course, that all this, to be convincing, requires much more development than I am able to give it in this context. I have done this elsewhere, otherwise I should not venture thus to dogmatize here. I should have to discuss the entire question of the methodology of history. I should have to point out how on the basis of the principle of the decentralization of the sciences, scientists themselves are coming to see the different material of history and how it must therefore differ in method from the physical sciences. I should have, finally, to show that history, as a science from which, as we say, lessons for man can be learned, must involve interpretation, and interpretation is possible only in terms of the ends and values of men.

All this must, however, be left for your own thought. Instead I shall merely emphasize again my main contention. Biologists, including Darwin himself, have told us that the long course of organic evolution justifies faith in further progress. By itself it does nothing of the kind. We have indeed no evidence that progress, as understood by organic evolution, is now over, but we also have no evidence that it is not. But human history is another matter. The long course of human history does justify the belief in further progress, for without that belief history itself does not exist. As one

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of the wisest students of history has said, "To draw from history the conclusion that it must always remain as it has been, is insincere. For without any inner progress, there is no history."

### D

Let us hear then the sum of the whole matter. Belief in human progress is a matter of faith, but it is what the philosopher calls a reasonable faith. It is not merely the healthy optimism of Western—more especially American—culture, it is the faith of rational men when they have contemplated all the possibilities.

It has been the fashion recently to poke fun at this faith as expressed in poetic form by the nineteenth century Victorian poet, Alfred Tennyson. When he cries,

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs  
sceptics want to know what that increasing purpose is and  
how he knows it. Still more are they disposed to laugh when  
in the same poem he cries,

I, the heir of all the ages in the foremost ranks of time.

Ah, there we have it, they say, that conceit of man which reached colossal proportions in the Victorian period—this measuring all the ranks of time in terms of the human.

But, believe me, my friends, all this laughter is cheap and not worthy of thoughtful men. The plain man at least will not be laughed out of this fundamental belief. In this respect he is often more philosophical than many of the more sophisticated intellectuals. His homely wisdom tells him truly that we must either go forward or backward, we cannot stand still; but this wisdom tells him also that anything else than forward movement in the story of human endeavor is as rationally inconceivable as it is morally intolerable.



## E

Belief in progress is, indeed, a faith with logical foundations. But it is easy to lose that faith if we keep our eyes on the surface of things. In times such as these we may feel like crying out in scorn against this "superstition of progress," as Tolstoy called it, with which we have veiled the realities of life. Tolstoy tells us that when, during his stay in Paris, he went to an execution and "saw the head severed from the body and both falling separately with a thud into a box, I understood with my whole being that no theories of progress could either justify or cover up that deed." How much more must men and women everywhere be crying out in anguish at the present moment against this superstition.

I am not insensible to the element of justice in this cry. Nor do I at all wonder that, as the booksellers tell us, innumerable people have been turning to Tolstoy's novel, *War and Peace*, that greatest of all historical novels, and containing also a significant philosophy of history. They seek enlightenment in the historical confusion of our day and Tolstoy does indeed tell us many things which may help to understanding and clarification.

Time and again, he emphasizes the exceeding difficulty which human beings experience in seeking to understand the meaning of contemporary events. The more catastrophic the upheaval, the more confused the reaction thereto. To conceal our bewilderment, he tells us, publicists and leaders invent the most obscure, intangible, and general abstractions, and call them "the aim and movement of humanity." The most usual virtues identified with one's own cause are freedom, enlightenment, equality, progress, civilization, and culture. Actually, says Tolstoy, the cause of human events is not these ideas but the recurrent will to power.

Tolstoy has, I think, much to teach us here. Unless we

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realize fully the element of rationalization involved in all justification of war—the inevitable misuse of democratic ideals which the passions of war engender—unless we realize fully the recurrent elements in history and the rôle which the will to power inevitably plays in all historic movements, we shall not see truly the true elements of progress in history. We shall lose our faith in progress, and our loss this time may, for many of us, be irrecoverable. But because men take these great ideas of freedom, enlightenment, and equality in vain, because in their rationalizations they intoxicate both themselves and us, it does not at all follow that they are not really the “aim and movement of humanity.” Tolstoy himself came later to see the element of truth in this view. *War and Peace* was written while he was still under the influence of Schopenhauer. We should remember, what is not sufficiently pointed out, that Tolstoy lost his faith in false notions of progress only to recover it in the form of the more ancient doctrine of Providence. He lost his illusions only to find that which was real behind the illusions.

### IV. HISTORY AND COSMOLOGY: PROGRESS AND THE DEGRADATION OF ENERGY

#### A

I hold, then, that faith in human progress is a justifiable faith. When stripped of its illusions, it is seen not only to be borne out by the facts of history, but also to be the *sine qua non* of there being any intelligible history at all. The story of man is, however, we are told, but five minutes in the long twenty-four hours of the story of the cosmos. Human history may give us the impression of a progress and a gain, but physical science tells a different story. Science tells us that the universe itself is “running down.” In the five

minutes of human history man may have many thrills and many elations, but after all it is the twenty-four hours that count and the end of that period is cosmic death.

This is the final challenge to our philosophical optimism. The postulate of a law of progress is, indeed, the lifeblood of history, as Henry Adams said, but, as he also tells us in his vivid language, "history and sociology are now gasping for breath." The acceptance of the principle of the degradation of energy, with its implications of a universe running down, means that there can be no progress—no increase and conservation of value in any ultimate sense—and, therefore, that the postulate, upon which not only our moral effort but all historical interpretation of moral effort is based, is an illusion. Many share with him this position. According to this law, the energy of the universe is running down like a clock and we can predict, if not with absolute certainty, yet with a high degree of probability, that in the future, far distant to be sure, the heat radiated from the sun will have become dissipated throughout the universe, our earth will become cold, the conditions of life will disappear, and life itself, with all its fret, but still more with all its values and ideals, will vanish without a trace. We are even told, by Mr. Russell for instance, that we must "build our lives on the firm foundations of despair," a despair which such a view is supposed to make inevitable to any sensitive mind.

The issue raised by such considerations may seem to many very remote and unreal, but it is really not, and such ideas have had more effect on men's philosophy of life in general, and on their attitude towards democratic dogma, than many suppose. For myself, I do not believe that we must build our lives on this firm foundation of despair. I think the cosmic foundations are quite different.

First of all, I do not believe that the calculations of physical science lead to any such conclusions regarding the future

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of the physical universe, and many physicists and astronomers agree with this view. I think it could be shown that these supposed deductions were based upon a conception of the space-time world of physics which has been completely altered by our modern conceptions of relativity. What is more to the point, I think it can be shown, and indeed I have shown elsewhere, that such propositions about the cosmos, whether to the effect the world is building up or running down, can, by their very nature, be neither empirically proved nor disproved—a view that is also held by many physicists. Obviously, I cannot go into these highly technical matters here, but I may be permitted to suggest that they have not yet been truly evaluated by popular science. In any case it is not the point which I chiefly want to make here.

This objection to the belief in progress is often met in the following way. It is obvious, as Professor Bury tells us, that progress would be valueless if there were cogent reasons for supposing that the time at the disposal of humanity is likely to reach a limit in the near future, but he thinks that there is no incompatibility between the law of progress and the law of degradation, because the possibility of progress is guaranteed, pragmatically at least, by the high probability, based on mathematical calculations, of a virtually infinite time to progress in.

This is doubtless true, but it is very questionable whether such a guarantee would satisfy our moral reason. No matter how long it would be guaranteed, actually it would ultimately be an illusion. For the reality would be a steady diminution in value ending finally in universal death. The certainty of ultimate failure would dwarf into insignificance our temporary successes. For there is one thing that would be forever irrational and intolerable no matter how long it were put off—namely, that humanity with all its intellectual and moral toil will vanish without a trace, and that not even

a memory will be left in any mind. The drafts which we make upon moral reason cannot be estimated in years, however loosely we play with them. The world bank is the one bank of which it may be said that if it is ultimately insolvent it has always been so.

## B

I hope it is clear in what direction this argument is tending. Any real faith in human progress, like faith in the other elements of democratic dogma, must be based upon much more solid foundations than any such merely pragmatic considerations. Like these other elements, it is bound up with a theological and philosophical structure that has, indeed, endured for a thousand years, and without this structure, this belief, like the others, the belief in reason and in natural rights, cannot endure.

An increasing number of historians and philosophers are coming to see this fact. Disillusioned with the illusory optimism of the nineteenth century, based as it was on a false conception of progress, they are now confessing that the idea of progress itself is intelligible only in terms of the theological and philosophical structure on which it originally rested. Having lost faith in God and the Divine Reason—and faith in the providential control of the events of time by an over-ruling Providence—we are relapsing into the essentially static and repetitive view of the time-process typical of antiquity and of the East. This is the significance of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence which raises its head in so many quarters. This is the significance of the historical pessimism which has flooded the twentieth century.

Men have tried to retain this faith without the world view with which it was bound up. They have tried to transfer it from its ancient base to the doctrine of evolutionary naturalism. But such an attempt is as fatuous as the attempt to

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graft our Christian morals on evolutionary naturalism, as Nietzsche clearly saw. I should like to read you a passage which expresses admirably this fatuous modern mood. It is written by Clarence Day whose play "Life With Father," many of you doubtless have enjoyed. It appeared in an article entitled "This Simian World," published in Harpers Magazine in 1920.

"They tell me," he cries, "that our race may be an accident in a meaningless universe; living its brief life uncared for on this dark cooling star; but even so, and all the more, what marvelous creatures we are! What fairy story, what tale from the Arabian Nights of the jinns, is a hundredth part as wonderful as the true fairy story of the simians?"

"And it is so much more heartening too, than the tales we invent. A universe capable of giving birth to such accidents is, blind or not, a good world to live in, even if not the best. We have won our way up against odds. We have made this our planet. It stirs me to feel myself part of our racial adventure.

"It is a venture that may never be noticed by gods. It may lead to no eternal reward in itself. God, or no God, we belong to a race that has made a long march and in the future may travel on greater roads still."

I am not sure whether to take this seriously or to see in it a conscious parody of the modern mood. The writer, it seems to me, must have had his tongue in his cheek. He seems much too clever and understanding to do otherwise. But I am not so sure, for there are many who talk in this way. If, however, our race is indeed an accident in a meaningless universe, then this fairy story of the simians is not wonderful. It is ghastly; as ghastly as the story of creative evolution pictured in *Fantasia*—a fantasy indeed, but one possible only to the modern irrationalist.

At the beginning of these lectures I spoke of the three

democratic dogmas which, if they do not hang together, will hang separately. Not very long ago, in a popular lecture before the University of Wisconsin, President Glenn Frank seemed to suggest that all these dogmas of the old liberalism, as he called them, must be discarded. Especially the dogma of automatic progress must be abandoned by the new liberalism. Of progress he says, "It is not automatic. It is a difficult achievement. It is a car to ride in, a campaign to be carried on by prophets, pioneers, and teachers." Now with the call to discard the illusions of progress I have no quarrel as this lecture has abundantly shown. Progress is indeed not automatic—it is not that mechanical thing conjured up by science, falsely so called. But neither is it merely a car to ride in, a campaign for prophets and teachers. That also is a travesty on the nature of our faith. If progress exists at all, it cannot depend wholly on man. To be genuine progress at all it must have its ground in a reason that transcends man. The meaning of events in space and time lies outside space and time.

## C

And so with this somewhat strong language I bring my third and final lecture to a close. We have been examining together the logical foundations of democratic dogma, that great structure or ideology with which our democratic way of life is bound up. In these lectures I have tried to be as objective as the subject matter and my own temperament would permit. Perhaps in these closing paragraphs you will allow me to lapse into the hortatory.

Some of you may recall a recent play by Saroyan called *The Time of Your Life*. In the play every now and then appears a curious old Arab workman who mutters, "No foundations, no foundations. All the way down." One can scarcely wonder at this comment upon our American life.

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The scene is laid in a water-front dive. As the play unrolls with its medley of meaningless and futile characters—the cynical and disillusioned protagonist of the play, endlessly drinking champagne and endlessly commenting on the meaninglessness of life; the barkeep and the prostitutes, the cynical visitors from the upper crust and the even more cynical and brutal police; the crazy youth endlessly trying to break the juke box (the play ends with his final triumph and with the mechanical waving of the Flag by the machine and the equally mechanical playing of the Star Spangled Banner)—as the play unrolls, I repeat, we do not wonder that this strange old man mutters and mutters, “No foundations, no foundations. All the way down.” Nor do we wonder that the playwright makes this the symbol of his play.

No foundations for our American democracy? I do not believe it. There are foundations but they are very deep—so deep in fact that we ourselves are often unaware of them. But perhaps one must go all the way down to find them. Perhaps it is only the shock of a great war and the realizing sense of the frailty of our superficial mechanical and technological superstructures that will help us again to realize these foundations. However that may be, these foundations are very deep and only the deepest thought can reveal them for what they are.

And since I have begun to be hortatory, perhaps I may as well go all the way and quote from Holy Writ itself. The words are from St. Paul, who was not only a great Apostle but a great philosopher. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.”

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